

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0926

June 16, 2020

Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
Hubert Humphrey Building, Room 416 G
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-3100

Dear Secretary Azar and Secretary DeVos:

As you know, many states, including my home state of Florida, are entering Phase Two of reopening. This is occurring despite not meeting the gating criteria set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the White House Coronavirus Task Force, which says that states and localities are only to proceed to Phase Two if they see a downward trajectory of documented cases or positive tests, for 28 days without evidence of a rebound. Unfortunately, as of this writing Florida has seen a 139% increase of average confirmed cases over the past 14 days.

This gives me great concern, as it is clear the virus is still spreading in our communities. Regardless of increasing numbers, state and county leaders are moving to reopen facilities like schools, childcare facilities, and summer and day camps. This reckless decision is even less responsible given the limited data we have regarding this virus' impact on children, and the increasing incidence of the Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). Although I recognize the economic importance of reopening schools and other childcare facilities to facilitate parents returning to work, our children should not serve as an experimental group for impacts of this disease.

Beyond our children, I am also concerned about the safety of staff and administrators at schools, camps, and childcare centers, particularly those who are elderly or medically vulnerable. And though the CDC recently issued guidance and flowcharts that established a broad framework for opening these facilities, there remain significant questions unanswered. Without clear, enforceable guidance, from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, we will unnecessarily put our children and staff at risk.

Please answer the following questions by Tuesday, June 30:

1. What enforceable steps are you taking to keep our students, children, and school and camp staff safe for states that are reopening schools and camps despite not meeting the necessary gating criteria?

2. What preparations need to be made at each school, childcare facility, or camp to ensure that students and staff are kept safe? Please keep in mind meals in common areas, proper ventilation in rooms, physical recreation, distancing among students and distance between students and staff, mask requirements, and coordinating transportation including buses and drop-off and pickup zones.
3. How should potential cases linked to schools and camps be handled? Should each school and facility have an administrator or team overseeing the COVID-19 response?
4. How should these facilities approach staff or children who are medically vulnerable?
5. What considerations must be made with respect to re-closing facilities with outbreaks? What conditions need to be present for them to subsequently reopen?
6. For schools that are unable to safely reopen, what modifications must be made regarding contact hours to have distance learning equivalent to in-person learning?
7. What additional physical and mental health staff and resources are you making available to these facilities? Given the mental health toll that COVID-19 has had on children, what Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) tools are you providing students and staff?

The safety of our children and the medically vulnerable must be our utmost priority. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Debbie', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress